DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 498 CS 013 701

AUTHOR Goldstein, Amy
TITLE Improving Students' Reading Fluency.
PUB DATE 1999-05-00
NOTE 45p.; Master's Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and IRI/Skylight.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Class Activities; Grade 1; Grade 2; *Instructional Effectiveness; Primary Education; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Fluency

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' reading fluency in order to become more proficient readers. The targeted population consists of first and second grade students in a growing middle class community located in the Midwest. The lack of fluent reading was documented through teacher observation and the calculation of how many words could be read correctly per minute. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that teaching reading fluency is a neglected aspect of reading instruction. A clear and comprehensive definition of fluency is needed in order for teachers to adequately understand its importance in reading instruction. Support is needed by teachers to facilitate fluency instruction in teacher education programs and literature and basal reading series. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a curricular overemphasis on word to word reading and exact word matching which inhibits the development of reading fluency. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of instructional interventions. The students were engaged in repeated reading of text, auditory modeling, supported reading techniques, and direct instruction of reading fluency. A comparison of pretest and posttest results showed that the students improved their oral reading fluency. Students improved words read correctly per minute and fluent reading skills according to a fluency rating system. The teacher-researcher strongly recommends the use of instructional strategies to encourage the development of reading fluency in primary students. Contains 16 references, 1 figure and 2 tables of data. Appendixes contain pre- and posttest reading passages, Aulls fluency rating system, and student interview questions. (Author/SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 433 498

IMPROVING STUDENTS' READING FLUENCY

By Amy Goldstein

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & IRI/Skylight
Field Based Masters Program
Chicago, Illinois

May, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A. Goldstein
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CS 013 701

SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

Dr. Susan of Marcus
Advisor

Dr. B Burns
Advisor

Dr Beverly Tulley
Dean, School of Education

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for improving students' reading fluency in order to become more proficient readers. The targeted population consists of first and second grade students in a growing, middle class community located in the Midwest. The lack of fluent reading was documented through teacher observation and the calculation of how many words could be read correctly per minute.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that teaching reading fluency is a neglected aspect of reading instruction. A clear and comprehensive definition of fluency is needed in order for teachers to adequately understand its importance in reading instruction. Support is needed by teachers to facilitate fluency instruction in teacher education programs and literature and basal reading series. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a curricular over emphasis on word to word reading and exact word matching which inhibits the development of reading fluency.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of instructional interventions. The students were engaged in repeated reading of text, auditory modeling, supported reading techniques, and direct instruction of reading fluency.

A comparison of pretest and post test results showed that the students improved their oral reading fluency. Students improved words read correctly per minute and fluent reading skills according to a fluency rating system. The teacher-researcher strongly recommends the use of instructional strategies to encourage the development of reading fluency in primary students.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT 1

General Statement of the Problem 1

Immediate Problem Context 1

The Surrounding Community 4

National Context of the Problem 5

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION 8

Problem Evidence 8

Probable Causes 10

CHAPTER 3 - THE SOLUTION STRATEGY 14

Literature Review 14

Project Objectives and Processes 21

Project Action Plan 22

Methods of Assessment 23

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT RESULTS 25

Historical Description of the Intervention 25

Presentation and Analysis of Results 27

Conclusions and Recommendations 30

REFERENCES 34

APPENDICES

Appendix A 36

Appendix B 37

Appendix C 38

Appendix D 39

Chapter 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Students of the targeted multiage first/second grade classroom have shown inconsistencies in the ability to decode words quickly and accurately so that their oral reading is fluent. Evidence of this problem has been identified through teacher observation. Research also indicates that teachers are unsure as to how to help students become more fluent readers. Jerry Zutell and Timothy V. Rasinski (1991) report "few regular classroom teachers have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what constitutes oral reading fluency".

Immediate Problem Context

Demographics of School Population

The identified school is predominantly a neighborhood school with a total enrollment of 665 students. This elementary school provides services for prekindergarten through fourth grade. The school is predominantly White (86%) and has a Hispanic population of 4.1%, a Black population of 1.4% and an Asian/Pacific Islander population of 8.4%. The number of students who speak different languages at home has been steadily rising. Currently, 4.5% of the students enrolled are Limited English Proficient (LED) and are eligible for English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Three and a half percent of the students live in low income homes. The average attendance is 95.85% and there are no cases of chronic truancy. The student mobility rate is 10% (1996 School Report Card).

Staff

The staff at the identified school consists of 31 classroom teachers. The support

staff includes part-time and full-time music, library, art, computer and two physical education teachers. The special services staff includes two speech pathologists, a resource teacher of the learning disabled, a school social worker, a school psychologist, a reading resource teacher, a part-time occupational therapist, a part-time adaptive physical education teacher, a hearing impaired itinerant teacher, a behavior disorder itinerant teacher and a math resource/gifted resource teacher. Other staff includes nine teacher's aides, two secretaries and one nurse. In addition to standard grade level classrooms, the school offers four - first/second grade multiage classrooms, as well as, a preschool classroom and two special education Early Childhood classrooms. The school also houses a Special Education run, self-contained behavior disordered classroom. One hundred percent of the teaching staff is White with 13.1% being male and 86.9% being female. The classroom teachers have an average of 10.4 years of experience. Nearly 57% of the teaching staff holds a Master's Degree or higher. The school district's average teacher's salary is $37,631, and the average administrator's salary is $76,388. The administrative staff at the identified school includes a principal and and assistant principal (1996 School Report Card).

School Program

The identified school provides a broad educational program for grades kindergarten through four. A strong program of fundamental skills, critical thinking and problem solving is emphasized while teaching to individual needs has been stressed. In addition to the regular academic program, special education resources and assistance in reading and math are provided. Gifted education is integrated into the regular classroom and computer education is provided weekly.

The reading curriculum at this school is taught through a variety of methods and resources. Grades one through four have the Houghton Mifflin literature based

reading program that was adopted in 1989. Through the guidance of the reading series the school developed a scope and sequence of skills and strategies that are to be taught. In addition to the reading program, most grade levels have novel sets that are integrated into the social studies and science curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of resources and strategies in their reading instruction. In 1997 a new spelling program was adopted in which many literature tie-ins are included as well.

Learning disability, behavior disorder, speech and language, occupational therapy services are provided to students based on individual needs outlined in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Students receive services through a combination of pull-out and in classroom support.

Remedial services, outside of special education, are available to students who have demonstrated a need and have been identified by their teachers. Remedial support is available to qualifying students in the areas of reading and math. This support consists of a combination of pull-out and in classroom support.

A gifted resource teacher is available for students who have demonstrated high academic abilities (based on academic testing and teacher recommendation). Support is received by integration of special assignments or projects within the regular classroom.

Counseling services recommended by teachers and/or parents are available for those students in need of services . The school social worker is a full time staff member.

Physical Setting

The identified school is located in a middle class residential suburb 29 miles northwest of a large Midwestern city. The school is a two story building that is carpeted and air conditioned. In addition to regular classrooms, the school has an art

room, a music room, a gym with a stage, a media center and a multi-purpose room. The community uses the building in numerous ways, and many extra-curricular activities are held in the school. The grounds include a blacktop area and a playground.

Provisions are made for a variety of services and activities for the students who attend. Parents may enroll their children in a before and after school day-care program called Clubhouse. Students may also enroll in after school programs that include activities such as after school sports, computer class, cooking class or science club. In addition, there is a first through fourth grade student council, an extra curricular music enrichment program and orchestra lessons offered to students.

The Surrounding Community

The identified school is located in a middle class residential community. The school is surrounded by single family homes. Many school age children reside in the community. The neighborhood is very child centered. There are walking paths and local parks nearby.

The identified school is in a community consolidated school district where students come from one primary and three secondary towns. The village has a population of 42,000 residents and a land area of 8.932 square miles. The median home value is $130,000 for a single family attached home and $223,000 for a single family detached home. The median income per household is $63,500. There are 8,276 families in the community who live in single family homes and 3,668 families who live in attached homes. There are 3,796 multiple family units within the community (Chamber of Commerce Community Guide, 1997).

Size and Administrative Structure of the District

The identified school is in a school district of four schools. There are two

elementary buildings housing grades Kindergarten through four, a middle school housing grades five and six, and a junior high school housing grades seven and eight. The administrative structure of the district consists of a school board, superintendent, three assistant superintendents, a director of technology, a director of special services and a principal and assistant principal for each of the buildings. The district has a total enrollment of 2,625 students and the cost expenditure per pupil is $6,488 in a school year (1996 School Report Card).

Community Support of the School

The school is supported by a very active Parent Teacher Organization which is involved in fund raising efforts to financially support the school and to provide service and help for community members in need. The school district also encourages community involvement in nearly all district committees and has organized a School/Business Organization which involves students and local professionals.

National Context of the Problem

In a charming book, *The Wednesday Surprise* by Eve Bunting, Anna, a seven year old, teaches her grandmother to read by reading together with her on Wednesday evenings. Anna says, "I sit beside her on the couch and she takes the first picture book from the bag. We read the story together, out loud, and when we finish one book we start the second." Her mother asked, "When did this wonderful thing happen?" Anna replies, "On Wednesday nights....and she took the books home and practiced." Anna realized what many of us do, the importance of practice in learning to read is extremely important. Furthermore, there is value in having readers develop fluency in oral reading.

In the targeted classroom it has been demonstrated that some students struggle with the ability to read with fluency. Non fluent reading is a direct result of poor word

recognition. According to *Becoming a Nation of Readers* "Research suggests that , no matter which strategies are used to introduce them to reading, the children who earn the best scores on reading comprehension tests in the second grade are the ones who made the most progress in fast and accurate word identification in the first grade" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985).

Teachers have long seen the importance of reading with fluency. In nearly all primary classrooms, children can be seen practicing oral reading during their reading instruction time. Teachers encourage the students to *read with expression* or *sound like you are talking* . Reading with fluency was identified as the second principle of reading in the well known report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* . It states "Readers must be able to decode words quickly and accurately so that this process can coordinate fluidly with the process of constructing the meaning of the text" (Anderson , Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985).

The problem students have with reading fluently has been identified as a teacher training problem as well. Although fluent reading has been identified as a major goal in learning how to read, it is often not directly taught in classrooms. Several factors are linked to this lack of attention. First, most basal reading series and teacher texts identify word recognition, vocabulary and comprehension as the major goals of their programs. Second, oral fluency has not been a topic focused on in most teacher training courses. A third factor is that few classroom teachers have a clear understanding of what oral reading fluency really consists. Some teachers may even unknowingly discourage fluent reading. Although word recognition is important to good reading, when beginning readers become so conscious about word-by-word reading it is harder for them to understand what they have read. When comprehension is absent, they are less able to use the flow of language to help them read quickly and accurately. Teachers who correct each oral reading error may very

well be encouraging non-productive behavior (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

When addressing the issue of reading fluency and the lack of understanding many teachers may have about this important reading skill, it is important to note the inconsistencies among researchers and "experts" as well. Marjorie Y. Lipson and Linda Bouffard Lang expose these inconsistencies. They write:

> Fluency is often defined as accurate, effortless and rapid reading. However there is curious lack of agreement about the relationship between fluency and overall reading ability. What is especially surprising is how little attention is actually directed towards clarifying the nature of fluency or identifying fluent/non fluent readers for the purposes of either research or instruction. Teachers receive few guidelines to help them decide who could benefit from specific types of instruction. Similarly, with few exceptions, researchers generally offer only the most cursory information about how subjects were selected and identified as fluent and non fluent (Lipson & Lang, 1991).

A teacher's misunderstanding and misconceptions about reading fluency may have negative consequences. In the school setting, judgments are often made about a student's reading ability only on the basis of the student's oral reading fluency. Many placement and grouping decisions are based on these informal evaluations. There is a tendency to make teaching recommendations prior to any clear understanding of what kind of instruction the child would benefit from (Lipson & Lang, 1991).

There is no question that reading fluency is an important element in the quest to help our students become effective readers. The questions seem to be how should fluency be assessed, identified and defined, and what instructional methods should teachers use to encourage fluency in beginning readers.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document how fluent the readers are in the targeted first and second grade multiage classroom, the teacher/researcher administered a pretest and rated oral reading on the Aulls fluency rating scale to all readers. The pretest determined speed and accuracy in reading a grade appropriate passage.

Within the first two weeks of school, the teacher/researcher made observations of reading skills among all the students in the targeted class. It was decided that only readers could be pretested and post tested for this study. In order to determine which students could be identified as readers, all children were asked to read the Dolch sight word list. Those students who could read 80% or more of the list would qualify for the study. Of the 23 students in the targeted multiage class, 13 were identified as readers.

The following two weeks of school, the teacher/researcher administered the pretest to each student independently. The students were to read aloud to the teacher a grade level appropriate passage (see Appendix A). The teacher/researcher timed the students reading the passages and made note of any errors in reading. Each sentence was also segmented and given a rating according to the Aulls Fluency Rating System (see Appendix B).

An analysis of the results from the pretest show that there are students who read at a slow rate and without much fluency in the targeted classroom. Fowler (1993) reminds us that meaning is best constructed at a rate close to 200 words per minute (WPM). Table 1 shows us that none of the 13 students pretested read at a rate that quickly. In a study conducted by Samuels (Mathes, Simmons & Davis, 1992) readers were reading a passage at an instructional level and his criterion for fluency success was 95 words correct per minute (WCPM). Even using the criterion Samuels sites as

successful, only three out of 13 readers read at a rate of 95 words correct per minute or better. A significant number of students had reading patterns in which words were read in small word groups rather than phrase groups. Of the 13 students pretested, five students received an overall Fluency Rating score of below 3.0.

Table 1

Summary of pretest results of the targeted class during September of the 1998-99 school year

Student	Rate/ WPM*	Aulls Rating	Word Recognition Accuracy	Words Correct per Minute
1	95.3	3.9	98%	93.7
2	161.8	3.9	99%	160.5
3	103.9	3.8	98%	102.1
4	92.8	3.4	97%	89.6
5	52.3	2.5	91%	47.8
6	94.3	3.5	95%	94.3
7	78.2	3.1	92%	72.1
8	43.2	2.6	92%	39.9
9	51.9	2.7	93%	48.4
10	122.1	3.7	94%	114.7
11	57.0	2.7	85%	48.7
12	48.0	2.3	89%	42.6

*words per minute

Lipson and Lang share a traditionally prescribed standard of acceptable reading levels (Lipson & Wixson, 1991 as cited in Lipson & Lang, 1991):

Independent level:

Word Recognition Accuracy---99+%

Instructional level:

Word Recognition Accuracy---95-98+%

(Questionable---90-94%)

Frustrational level:

Word Recognition Accuracy---below 90%

Using this standard was a good indicator that the passage used for the pretest was at the instructional level for most of the students pretested. For only two students, this passage was at the frustrational level. One students was at the independent level with the passage used.

In conclusion, the students demonstrated a need for improved reading fluency. The students read at a slow rate and some read without looking at the text as phrase groups.

Probable Causes

Analysis of probable cause data indicates that reading fluency is often a misunderstood aspect of reading instruction. Researchers and educators lack agreement about the nature of fluency and its relationship to skilled reading.

The reading instruction offered at the targeted school can be described as inconsistent from classroom to classroom. Teachers are encouraged to share and use best practices and are frequently in serviced about reading instruction strategies at staff meetings. A literature-based reading program is available and use of other resources is encouraged. Teachers are ultimately in charge of developing their own

reading instruction lessons. Oral reading fluency is easily identified as a goal for proficient reading, yet a clear understanding of what this entails is absent.

Despite an awareness of its importance by educators and researchers, oral reading fluency is a neglected aspect of regular classroom reading instruction (Allington, 1983 as cited in Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Zutell and Rasinski (1991) have cited three factors contributing to this neglect. First, most basal reading series identify the development of skills in word recognition, comprehension, and vocabulary as major goals of their programs. Oral reading fluency tends to be viewed as an outcome, rather than a contributing factor to proficient reading. Therefore, most activities provided in these series involve instruction on words in isolation. Second, oral reading fluency has not been a central topic in preservice and inservice teacher training courses. Most text books for education students fail to include an extended discussion of oral fluency if it's included at all. A third factor is that few regular classroom teachers have a clear and comprehensive understanding of what constitutes oral reading fluency.

The lack of understanding of what constitutes oral reading fluency has many researchers concerned. Teachers have no single definition that permit them to identify fluent and non fluent readers. Authors offer no explicit explanation of the appropriate place of fluency in reading instruction. Finally, discussions of fluency often fail to address developmental and individual variables among students (Lipson & Lang, 1991). Without these questions and variables being addressed, teachers are unable to incorporate fluency instruction in their classrooms.

There are some teachers who try to offer instruction to students in the area of oral reading fluency. There are potential problems to teaching fluency to a whole classroom. The fluency training methods available were originally intended for use in corrective reading situations in which a teacher works with a small group of children

(Rasinski, 1989). Although these methods are positive, they often have a narrow focus. The corrective fluency methods may not be appropriate for normal readers.

A further concern about oral reading fluency is when teachers unwittingly discourage fluency. "As teachers, we frequently think of decoding only as using phonics to sound out words not recognized by sight. But this definition is too narrow and causes us to limit the decoding strategies we make available to our readers" (Fowler, 1993). Quick and easy word recognition is clearly an important aspect of fluent reading. Some teachers focus too much on exact word matching. This may lead students to attend to individual words *at the expense of* other aspects of fluency. When teachers correct oral reading errors as soon as they occur, they may be encouraging non fluent reading (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Similarly, poor readers usually receive word recognition instruction. Word recognition alone does not directly facilitate fluency (Lipson & Lang, 1991).

A review of literature offers probable causes as to why some students possess a lack of fluency. Some causes include inadequate sight word knowledge, anxiety, and students' fear of risk-taking in reading (Rhodes & Dudley-Marling,1988 as cited in Lipson & Lang, 1991). Another theory states disfluency may result from lack of opportunities to practice. A limited exposure to print will contribute to a lack of fluency (Stanovich, 1986; Stanovich & West, 1989 as cited in Lipson & Lang, 1991). One study examined how quickly a skilled reader could read and found competent readers read at a normal rate of about 250 words per minute. This study concluded that those individuals who read at a rate slower than 200 words per minute impeded their ability to construct meaning in the text (Fowler, 1993).

Nathan and Stanovich (1991) describe a downward spiral when reading fluency is not present. They explain that when a reader's cognitive processes are attending at full capacity to word recognition, there is a decreased capacity for

comprehension. With a lack of comprehension, the reader is robbed of the enjoyment of reading. When a reader has unrewarding reading experiences it will lead to a decrease in reading related activities. They conclude that non fluent reading leads to less reading. A continual lack of exposure and practice causes the downward spiral to continue.

The causes for poor fluency and a lack of fluency instruction are many. The research literature indicates a lack of agreement and understanding of what role fluency plays in becoming a proficient reader. It is evident that there is a need to address the issue of reading fluency in order to fulfill that elusive goal of the nation of readers.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

A review of the literature on reading fluency revealed various solutions to the problem of children who read in a way that is not fluent. The literature also offers solutions to teachers who want to better know how to help facilitate fluent reading through classroom instruction. Reading fluency has been identified as a reading goal by the 1985 national report, *Becoming A Nation of Readers* and is an important aspect of proficient reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott &Wilkinson, 1985). Solutions to incorporating fluency instruction in the classroom includes repeated reading, auditory modeling, direct instruction, text segmenting, supported reading, and use of easy reading materials. The solutions the literature offers to teachers who are in need of a more comprehensive understanding of fluency includes defining fluent reading, the use of fluency rating scales among teachers and engaging teachers in examining fluency in their own classrooms.

The method of repeated reading has been thoroughly examined in the literature as a method to improve reading fluency. Repeated reading is simply the practicing of rereading text until it is "fluid, flowing and facile" (Dowhower, 1991). Repeated reading was first proposed by Samuels in 1979 (as cited in Fowler, 1993). Students read independently until they can read the text at a predetermined speed. The text being offered to the student is at an instructional level. The method is supported by the thinking that achieving fluency requires practice. Rasinski (1989) offers the clarification that although repetition is often translated into repeated exposures to words in isolation, research has shown that repetition is more effective when students meet the words in a variety of texts or through repeated exposures to one text.

Rasinski (1989) also suggests that repeated readings do not necessarily need to be dull or boring. Many natural classroom environments encourage repeated readings such as putting on plays or working in pairs.

Dowhower (1991) offers explanations as to why and how repeated readings work to improve reading fluency. She explains that multiple readings may enable readers to discover appropriate syntactic phrasing in the written words and to group words much like they would be when spoken. She further explains that repeated readings allow a series of approximations to be made by the student. This will gradually help the student practice word groupings until the rhythm sounds right to the reader's ear. Dowhower (1991) also offers evidence that repeated reading not only improves speed and accuracy, but helps prosodically as well. When a child engages in repeated readings, there is a significant decrease in the number of pausal intrusions within a story. The practice from repeated readings helps a child perceptually isolate appropriate phrases with intonation and segmental lengthening.

Blum and Koskinen (1991) examine many benefits of using repeated reading as a strategy to improve fluency. In their article they discuss the characteristics of expert readers and how using repeated reading can foster expertise in children in the area of reading. In the instructional methods described, students reread specific story content at least four or five different times. Some of the readings are done with a partner. One immediate benefit is the increase in content knowledge. Another benefit cited is the increase in strategic knowledge. All students participated as readers and listeners; therefore, there was the opportunity for students to reflect on their own reading improvement. By monitoring and guiding a partner, the listener developed a metacognitive awareness of the critical features of fluent reading. Blum and Koskinen also felt that this instructional technique increased the motivation of students.

Further studies show support for the instructional method of repeated readings.

It seemed at first the literature focused on using repeated readings as a strategy for poor readers. It showed a dramatic increase in speed and decrease in reading errors for poor readers (Samuels, 1979 as cited in Mathes, Simmons & Davis, 1992). Then there were studies showing that repeated readings could dramatically improve the fluency among average readers (Dowhower, 1986, 1987 as cited in Schreiber, 1991). Schreiber (1991) believes that this instructional method could even be improved if it is teamed up with the strategy called auditory modeling. He says "repeated readings accompanied by a fluent oral adult reader to provide modeling .....might well be even more effective than unassisted, unmodeled repeated readings. Fluent oral modeling would provide direct prosodic indications of phrasal organization, thereby permitting beginning readers to identify written phrasal chunks more easily" (Schreiber, 1991).

Finally, the literature supports that repeated readings is not just for beginning readers. In an article by Stayter and Allington (1991) they describe the use of repeated reading in a seventh-grade classroom. The students were heterogeneously grouped and spent five days reading, rehearsing, and performing short dramas. Through the use of repeated readings the students understood their characters better, gained expression in their speaking voices and gained a greater understanding of the text.

Young readers and other less fluent readers may not always know what fluent reading should be like. The second method for improving reading fluency that has been supported in the literature is auditory modeling. Rasinski says, "It seems clear that students need frequent opportunities to see and hear fluent reading. Since the most fluent reader in the classroom is the teacher, the teacher should be the primary model" (1989).

The method of auditory modeling can be used in a variety of ways. It can be a live or taped prosodic rendering of the text the students will read. It can also be used

in combination with text segmenting and/or with repeated readings. Dowhower (1991) says, "Auditory or oral modeling may be the most powerful of all techniques in encouraging prosodic reading." Prosodic reading can be described as reading with expression. Dowhower believes that modeling shows the reader specifically where to pause, where to change pitch, which words to stress and which segments to elongate. She believes that reading with expression is equally as important to fluent reading as are speed and accuracy.

Mathes, Simmons and Davis (1992) further describe the strategy of auditory modeling although they call it oral previewing. They view this method as a way to prepare students for the text that is going to be read. They describe this strategy as one to be used with repeated readings. It is also again stressed that the model must provide a fluent reading of the text for this strategy to be of benefit. They make the recommendation that this method be used with students who have some reading skills, but read less that 45 words per minute. They further conclude that although tape recorded readings are a feasible option they are not as powerful as a live oral previewing.

A third strategy to improve reading fluency described in the literature is direct instruction. This is another strategy that can be used in combination with others. The thought behind this strategy is that students need to be metacognitively aware of what happens when they read. This awareness may be particularly helpful in the development of fluency. A teacher could do a number of things to provide direct instruction and feedback about reading fluency. A teacher could remind the class to listen to the expression in his/her voice, the speed at which the text is read, or when stops or pauses occur. Short discussions like these could heighten students' awareness of their own reading (Rasinski, 1989).

Hoffman and Isaacs (1991) described an interesting method of direct instruction

to improve reading fluency called the "recitation plan". A recitation lesson follows a three step pattern. First, the teacher reads the text to the students to model fluent, expressive reading. Next, the teacher engages the students in a discussion of the text to build comprehension and appreciation. Finally, the teacher guides the students in practice to prepare them to read the text orally. The lesson concluded with the students taking turns reading the text orally for the class. Hoffman and Isaacs viewed this method as a reasonable alternative to the round robin patterns of reading instruction. The researchers then refined this method for teacher to use in reading groups. The lesson now follows five steps. The steps are as follows:

1. The teachers read the story to the students in the group. The teachers use the same strategies in the read aloud as they would use in sharing a trade book with the class during story time.
2. The teacher encourages student responses to the story that reveal personal connections to the literature as well as connections to other pieces of literature.
3. The teachers guide the students in a comprehensive analysis of the story using a story grammar framework or some other analytical model. New vocabulary is focused on here.
4. The teacher guides the students in the practicing of the story to build fluency. This is done both directly (e.g., using modeling) and indirectly (e.g., setting up time for independent and/or paired reading practice). The teachers use ongoing, informal assessments of fluency to determine student progress.
5. The students are given an opportunity to orally interpret a portion of the story for the rest of the group.

The results from using this lesson plan resulted in significant gains in reading rate over a relatively short period of time.

Fluency involves reading texts in multi-word chunks or phrases. Word by word

reading is not fluent reading. The next fluency strategy to be described is called text segmenting. This is when the text has marked boundaries that segment the text into phrases. The markings should help students develop a sense of phrasing by reminding students when to pause. Text segmenting can be done several ways such as putting each phrase on a line by itself in column fashion, the text can be indented to make the division more clear or slashes, blank spaces or periods can be added between phrases. This gives the student a model that explicitly shows how to chunk words in text. It is believed that this strategy can benefit all readers even at high school and college levels (Dowhower, 1991).

Giving students support while reading is critical to the development of fluency. Support can be offered to a beginning reader in a number of ways. Support is achieved through the student hearing a fluent rendition of a passage while simultaneously reading the same (Rasinski, 1989). One example of supported reading was described earlier in the recitation plan (Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991). A teacher may be the one who is offering the support. The most common form of supported reading is choral reading. This is when students read a selected passage in unison. The teacher needs to make sure several fluent readers are a part of the group to lead the way in choral reading. The use of tape recorded passages in another way to provide support during reading. This format's appeal is in that students can work on their fluency independently (Rasinski, 1989). Offering students support during reading is another method that will encourage fluent reading. It is one that can easily be combined with other strategies.

It has been discovered that fluency is best promoted when students are provided with materials that they find relatively easy as far as word recognition, so they can move beyond decoding and concentrate on phrasing and reading with expression (Rasinski,1989). DeFord (1991) describes characteristics of books that are

appropriate for beginning readers. Text that is highly predictable, repetitive, text that has familiar concepts and has a good match between the text and its illustrations is most helpful in aiding fluency. Furthermore the reader's knowledge needs to be considered. Rasinski (1989) gives the advice to teachers to stock their classroom libraries with books that represent a variety of difficulty levels and interests.

The literature has made it clear that there is a need to educate teachers in the area of reading fluency instruction. Zutell and Rasinski (1991) describe solutions as to how teachers can attend to their students' reading fluency. They call for a more clear definition of what fluent reading is. They found some teachers used the words "good", "above-average", and "high" to describe fluent reading. They were unclear as to what the components of fluent reading are. Zutell and Rasinski offer this definition "(a) the reading appears fairly effortless or automatic, (b) readers group or "chunk" words into meaningful phrases and clauses, and (c) readers use pitch, stress, and intonation appropriately to convey the meanings and feelings they believe the author intended." Zutell and Rasinski feel teachers need to be engaged in examining fluency. Activities might include having teachers segment text, listening to children's oral readings at the instructional level, and then listening again to the story with the text available for the students to follow along. Teachers can learn to concentrate on the holistic quality of reading. Furthermore teachers can be taught to use fluency rating scales. Once a teacher has a clear understanding of reading fluency, the use of a fluency rating scale can assist teachers in assessing students' oral reading fluency skills. The scales offered by Zutell and Rasinski were slightly modified versions of others created by Allington & Brown (1979) and Aulls (1978) (see Appendix B).

The research literature offered a number of solution strategies and instructional methods to improve oral reading fluency among students. Those instructional strategies include having students engage in repeated reading, listen to auditory

modeling, benefit from direct instruction and participate in supported reading. Suggestions offered to teachers included using fluency rating scales and a better definition and understanding of what reading fluency is. Many of the strategies can be used in combination with one another. Several were described with implications as to how the methods could be used in the classroom. Further, it seems the solutions imply further education is needed for educators as to how to attend to reading fluency.

Project Objective and Processes

After reviewing the literature on the problem of students' lack of reading fluency, the researcher created the following project objective:

> During the period of September, 1998 to January, 1999, the first and second grade students from the targeted class will improve their oral reading fluency through the use of repeated readings, choral reading and auditory modeling. Evidence of improvement will be shown by rate of reading and accuracy, fluency rating scores and student interviews.

In order to accomplish this project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Obtain appropriate reading material in which the students will engage in repeated readings.
2. Allow for opportunities with tape recorders and/or adult readers to provide auditory modeling.
3. Develop a schedule and routine in order for students to engage in repeated reading.
4. Develop student's cooperative group skills in order to accomplish choral

reading.

Project Action Plan

August 25 to October 2 Formal and Informal Observations

The first month of school will be spent observing the reading skills of the students. Since the students are members of a first and second grade multiage classroom, there will be some students who will be non-readers at this point in the school year. Those students determined to be non-readers would not be included in the data for this action research project. The teacher/research will observe students to determine who are the readers and who are the non-readers. Observations will include teacher observations and adequacy of reading a Dolch sight word list. Those students who demonstrate independent reading skills and an accuracy of at least 80% on the Dolch sight word list will be included in the data for this action research project.

October 5 to October 16 Pretest Subjects

Each subject who qualifies as a reader will be pretested to determine how many words were read correctly per minute (WCPM). The pretest will involve each student reading a grade appropriate passage (see Appendix A). The teacher/researcher will time the student reading the passage and check for accuracy. Also, a rating will be given to each reader according to the Aulls Fluency Rating System (1978) (see Appendix B). To arrive at a number to rate the audio sample, each sentence is given a rating according to the rating scale. An average rating is then calculated for the entire reading passage.

October 19 to January 8 Intervention Occurs

The students in the class will be instructed to practice their reading in a

particular way. Groups of students will be reading material that is at their instructional level. Reading materials may include the pre-primer, the literature based reading series entitled Houghton Mifflin Literary Readers (1989), reader's theater, poetry or trade books. Before they read the determined reading material, they will be exposed to an auditory model of the story. They will either hear the story read by the teacher, or they will listen to the story on an auditory tape. The students will then engage in repeated readings of the story. The students will be asked to read the story in choral reading fashion the first time they read it. The second time they read the story, they will take turns reading with a partner or within a group. This is a form of supported reading. The third reading will occur independently or again with a partner. The teacher will encourage reading to be swift and will discuss with the students the goal of becoming a fluent reader. This type of structured reading practice will occur no less than one time a week and no more that three times a week.

January 8 to January 22 Post-test Subjects

The post-test will parallel the pretest methods. The students will be asked to read a grade level reading passage (see Appendix C). The teacher/research will test for accuracy and calculate how many words are read correctly per minute (WCPM). The teacher will also give each reader a rating according to the Aulls Fluency Rating System as described in the pretest. The students will be interviewed with teacher-made interview questions (see Appendix D). This will elicit information about the students' attitudes about reading.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the interventions, a post test determining how many words were read correctly per minute (WCPM) will be given to the subjects. In

addition, the teacher will also give the readers a rating according to the Aulls Fluency Rating System. Students will be interviewed in order to determine their attitudes about reading.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve students' oral reading fluency. Repeated reading, auditory modeling, supported reading and direct instruction were the interventions selected to effect the desired changes.

The first phase of the action plan was to make formal and informal observations of the students in the targeted classroom. During the first month of school, the teacher/researcher observed the students' oral reading skills. It was necessary to determine which students in the targeted classroom were readers. Those students with observable or questionable reading skills were asked to read the Dolch sight word list. Those students who demonstrated independent reading skills and an accuracy of at least 80% on the Dolch sight word list were included in the data collection of this project.

During the sixth week of school, a pretest was administered to the targeted first and second grade students. The pretest involved students reading a grade appropriate passage (Appendix A) to the teacher/researcher. The reading samples were timed, checked for accuracy, and given a rating according to the Aulls Fluency Rating System (Appendix B) (1978). In order to give a rating according to this system, the teacher/researcher scores each line that the student reads and then determines an average score for the whole reading passage. Words read correctly per minute were calculated for each student.

The interventions aimed at improving the students' oral reading fluency began immediately after the pretest was administered. The students in the targeted classroom read a wide variety of reading materials in small groups called Book Clubs with the teacher. The reading materials included trade books, stories from the

literature-based reading series, poetry, and reader's theaters. A routine was established so the children would have an auditory model of the reading material before they began to read. Most frequently, the auditory model was presented by the teacher to the small group of readers called the Book Club. There were a few occasions that the Book Clubs listened to the reading material from a tape recording. There were other occasions when the auditory model was provided by a parent volunteer in the targeted classroom. It was explained to the children that the auditory model was being provided to help the students become more fluent readers. The teacher/researcher then directed the students to read in a choral reading fashion. This is a form of supported reading. The students with the teacher/researcher read the reading material together. The reading was then repeated in the Book Club. The students took turns reading while participating in the group. The teacher/researcher encouraged students to read at a swift pace and in a clear voice. Additional repetitions reading the same reading material either took place with partners or independently. The Book Clubs typically met with the teacher twice a week for about 20 minutes each day. A third day during the same week was spent reading with the group, a partner, or independently.

The interventions as described continued for four months. Some of the routines did change over time. The targeted students were not enthusiastic about the choral reading. They were very anxious to be heard individually rather than within their group. The teacher/researcher began eliminating the choral reading in the beginning occasionally, and by the third month it was eliminated all together. The targeted students most enjoyed taking turns reading with the teacher/researcher present. The students often repeated that routine twice. Students also preferred the third or fourth reading to occur with the whole group rather than just with a partner or independently. This was allowed on some occasions, while on other occasions the students were

directed to read with a partner or independently.

The only time the teacher/researcher deviated from the plan was when a Book Club was involved in reading a novel with several chapters. The routines of offering an oral preview of the reading material and repeating the reading three or four times would have been too time consuming. Fluency support was still offered. Students were still encouraged to read together and to read at a swift pace.

The project culminated with a post test given to the targeted students. Like the pretest, students read a grade appropriate reading passage (Appendix C) that was timed, checked for accuracy, and given a fluency rating. Students also completed an interview which was given to elicit their attitudes about reading.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the auditory modeling, the repeated reading, the supported reading, and the direct instruction of reading fluency, the same students who participated in the pretest were now given a post test. The students were again asked to read a grade appropriate reading passage that would be timed, checked for accuracy and given a fluency rating. Eleven of the original twelve students were post tested. One student moved during the intervention portion of this project. The results of the post test are presented in Table 2. When discussing the results, student number two will be omitted since this student was not involved in the post test.

Table 2 shows many improvements in the students' reading fluency. All but two of the students increased the number of words read per minute. Fowler (1993) stated that meaning was best constructed when readers read at a rate of 200 WPM. None of the students in the targeted classroom reached that rate of reading, however, the improvements ranged from increases of 12 WPM to 50 WPM. Samuels (Mathes, Simmons & Davis, 1992) set a criterion for 95 words correct per minute for fluency success. Five of the students exceeded that criteria and all but two students improved

the number of words read correctly per minute.

Table 2

Summary of post test results of the targeted class during January of the 1998-99 school year

Student	Rate/ WPM*	Aulls Rating	Word Recognition Accuracy	Words Correct per Minute
1	143.3	3.9	100%	143.3
2				
3	120.9	3.8	99%	120.0
4	90.0	3.5	98%	87.9
5	65.6	3.5	99%	65.1
6	113.8	3.8	99%	112.1
7	126.9	3.7	99%	125.9
8	93.3	3.7	98%	91.8
9	90.0	3.8	99%	89.3
10	140.7	3.9	99%	139.6
11	37.8	3.0	92%	34.8
12	60.9	3.1	97%	59.1

*words per minute

Table 2 also shows improvements in the students' fluency ratings. The post test showed that all of the students in the targeted classroom read in mostly phrase groups or all in phrase groups. All of the students received a rating of 3.0 or higher using the Aulls Fluency Rating System (see Appendix B).

Finally the post test shows improvements in word recognition accuracy. All of the students in the targeted classroom improved their word recognition accuracy. The range for the post test is from 92% accuracy to 100% accuracy with the mode being 99% accuracy.

When looking at a comparison of the pretest and post test results, it is easy to see many improvements. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the pretest and post test results for words read correctly per minute. As stated previously, all but two of the students made improvements. Student 4 decreased very slightly and student 11 was the only student with a marked decrease. The calculation of words read correctly per minute is the most common measurement of reading fluency.

Figure 1. Pretest and Post test results of words read correctly per minute.

Comparing the remaining data from the pretest and post test shows improvements in reading fluency. The results of the pretest showed that five of the students received an overall Fluency Rating score of below 3.0. The results of the post test showed that all of the students scored a 3.0 for their Fluency Rating or better.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After reviewing current research on the topic of oral reading fluency, the teacher/researcher designed an action plan based on auditory modeling, supported reading, repeated reading and direct instruction of reading fluency. Upon examining the results of this project, those aspects proved to be essential to the achievement of the objective. The teacher/researcher found that the targeted students improved their oral reading fluency. Eighty-two percent of the targeted students improved the rate of words they could read per minute and how many words were read correctly per minute. Further, all of the students in the targeted classroom improved their word recognition accuracy. Upon comparing the Fluency Rating scores, 18% of the students kept a score above a 3.5 and 82% improved their Fluency Rating scores. All students resulted with a score of 3.0 or better.

After the post test was concluded, the targeted students were given an interview to determine how they felt about their own reading (see Appendix D). All of the students responded in a positive way when asked "How do you feel when you read books in school?". One student responded "I feel very proud that I know how to read well." The targeted students have demonstrated positive responses to the interventions implemented. They seem to have enjoyed the small group interactions and the opportunities they had to read aloud with their Book Club. They seemed to feel that it was valuable to practice reading by using the repeated reading strategy. Another interview question asked "What do you think would make you a better reader?" . Six of the eleven students responded with an answer that stated something

about practicing. Other responses included "sounding out words better" and "looking at the words before you say them".

The direct instruction given to the students about reading fluently did not seem to have much long term impact. Students were asked in the interview if they felt reading slower made them a better reader or if reading faster made them a better reader. Sixty-four percent responded that reading slower would make them a better reader. Reasons why included having a better understanding of what they were reading, and also, the feeling that they are learning more. The remaining 36% of the students responded that reading faster would make them a better reader. Those supported reasons included being able to learn more and being able to understand the books. One student responded "Reading faster would make me a better reader because then I can read a big fat chapter book." During the direct instruction in the classroom, students were encouraged to read at a swift pace. They were told that reading at a "talking" pace would help them understand the text better. They were also told that the repeated reading would help them with their comprehension.

The targeted students were also asked if they felt they understood what they read at school. All of the students responded positively. They feel they understand what they are asked to read at school. It seems that the students felt good about how they read at school, and also, they felt they had good comprehension. The students were not as clear about why they were successful readers.

The objective of this action plan was to improve the students' oral reading fluency through the use of repeated readings, supported reading and auditory modeling. The data collected from the pretests and post tests along with the student interviews can be used to draw conclusions about each of these strategies.

The strategy of repeated readings was suggested in the research by numerous researchers. Rasinski (1989) tells us that "achieving fluency requires practice with one

text." The students in the targeted classroom used this strategy weekly with their reading assignments, and the data collected suggests that this helped improve the students rate of reading and accuracy. The students felt practicing reading a story repeatedly would help them become better readers.

Supported reading is a strategy that can be used numerous ways in the classroom. One form of supported reading is choral reading; when a group of students read the same text in unison. This was a strategy that the teacher/researcher began using, but phased out because of lack of student interest. Supported reading was continued in the targeted classroom in different ways. Students read with a partner, read with the teacher, or read aloud with a group. Rasinski (1989) tells us that support during reading is critical to the development of fluency. "Support is achieved through the student hearing a fluent rendition of a passage while simultaneously reading the same." (Rasinski, 1989). It seems that the use of supported reading in the targeted classroom did help the students achieve better reading fluency. Student attitudes were important with this strategy. It was necessary to find the best method of supported reading to help the students feel successful. The teacher/researcher found that supported reading with one other person was successful in the targeted classroom because it created a comfortable reading atmosphere for the students.

Providing students with a fluent model was another strategy frequently suggested in the literature. It seems important for students to see and hear fluent reading. The students in the targeted classroom seemed to really enjoy the auditory modeling of the stories they read. This strategy also allowed for comprehension to occur before the students began to read. When the students could anticipate what was happening next in the story, they seemed to be able to read in more phrase groups rather than word to word reading. It appears that this strategy was very helpful to the students in acquiring better reading fluency, and a good understanding of what

they were reading.

The teacher/researcher strongly reccomends the use of auditory modeling, supported reading, and repeated reading to help students improve their oral reading fluency. The students in this project have demonstrated improvements in word recognition accuracy and words read correctly per minute. The students have also shown a positive attitude towards reading and they see themselves as successful readers. The routines established were easy to implement in the targeted classroom and elicited positive reactions from all students.

References

Anderson, R., Hiebert,E., Scott, J. & Wilkinson, I. (1985). Becoming a Nation of Readers. Urbana, IL: The Center for the Study of Reading.

Bunting, E. (1989). The Wednesday Surprise. New York: Clarion Books.

Blum, I. & Koskinen, P. (1991). Repeated Reading: A Strategy for Enhancing Fluency and Fostering Expertise. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 195-200.

DeFord, D. (1991). Fluency in Initial Reading Instruction: A Reading Recovery Lesson. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 201-210.

Dowhower, S. (1991). Speaking of Prosody: Fluency's Unattended Bedfellow. Theory Into Practice,30 (3), 165-175.

Fowler, T. (1993). Fluency in Reading: Risk Success. Reading Improvement, 30 (2), 109-112.

Hoffman, J. & Isaacs, M. (1991). Developing Fluency Through Restructuring the Task of Guided Oral Reading. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 185-194.

Lipson, M. & Lang, L. (1991). Not as Easy at it Seems: Some Unresolved Questions Questions About Fluency. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 218-227.

Mathes, P., Simmons,D. & Davis, B. (1992). Assisted Reading Techniques for

Developing Reading Fluency. Reading Research and Instruction, 31 (4), 70-77.

Nathan, R. & Stanovich, K. (1991). The Causes and Consequences of Differences in Reading Fluency. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 176-184.

Rasinski, T. (1989). Fluency for Everyone: Incorporating Fluency Instruction in the Classroom. Reading Teacher, 42 (9), 690-693.

Schreiber, P. (1991). Understanding Prosody's Role in Reading Acquisition. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 158-164.

Stayter, F. & Allington, R. (1991). Fluency and the Understanding of Texts. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 143-148.

Zutell, J. & Rasinski, T. (1991). Training Teachers to Attend to Their Students' Oral Reading Fluency. Theory Into Practice, 30 (3), 211-217.

(Community) Chamber of Commerce. (1997). 1997 Community Guide [Brochure].

School Report Card (1996) K-8 D Version (Publication No. 3404910202003).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pretest Reading Passage

When it was Sharing Time at school, Mary Jo wouldn't share anything.

She was too shy to tell the other children about anything.

She didn't think they would listen to her.

Miss Willet was the teacher.

She would ask, "Mary Jo, do you have something to share with us?"

Mary Jo would shake her head.

Then she would look down.

"Why don't you share anything?" her friend Laurie would ask.

"I will someday," Mary Jo would say.

"I just don't want to today."

Mary Jo did want to share, but she was too shy.

At night her father would ask, "Did you share something today?"

Mary Jo would shake her head and say, "Not today."

Appendix B

Aulls Fluency Rating System

To arrive at a number to rate the audio sample, each sentence is segmented to reflect the phrasing used by the reader. The sample is rated from 1 to 4. The ratings are as follows:

1 one word reading pattern

2 two word groups reading pattern

3 mostly phrase groups

4 all phrase groups

(Aulls 1978 as cited in Lipson & Lang 1991)

Appendix C

Post test Reading Passage

Little Owl rolled over in his bed and pulled the covers up around him.

He liked listening to the sound of the rain falling on the leaves outside.

Suddenly, Little Owl sat up.

"Tonight is my birthday!" he cried.

He jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen.

"Good evening, Little Owl," Mother said with a smile.

"Are you ready for breakfast?"

"Yes, I'm hungry," said Little Owl, sitting down at the table.

"Do you know what tonight is?"

"Yes, I do," said Mrs. Owl.

"Tonight is the night I must clean the cupboards."

"No, no!" said Little Owl.

"I mean, do you know what *tonight* is: It's a special night."

Mother laughed.

"Special? There's nothing special about cleaning the cupboards."

"She forgot," Little Owl said to himself.

Appendix D

Student Interviews

1. How do you feel when you read books in school?

2. Do you think you understand what you read when you read in school?

3. What do you think would make you a better reader?

4. Do you think reading faster would make you a better reader? Why or why not?

5. Do you think reading slower would make you a better reader? Why or why not?

6. Do you think when you read it sounds the same as when you are just talking? Why or why not?